



News from

United States Senator Daniel K. Akaka

President Must Articulate Clear Plan for Iraq Withdrawal

In 2002, after meeting with many of our field commanders in my capacity as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, reviewing intelligence reports that questioned Iraq's purported weapons of mass destruction program, and leading hearings on Iraq as Chairman of the International Security Subcommittee, I voted against authorizing the use of force against Iraq.



Mosul, Iraq, Mar. 2004—Our service men and women deserve our appreciation and support. It's time to bring our involvement in Iraq to an end.

The evidence cited by President Bush as justification for going to war was inadequate and I was unwilling to risk the lives of the men and women of our armed services without verification of the presence of weapons of mass destruction. I urged the Administration not to enter Iraq without proper planning, including a clear exit strategy. The war has tragically resulted in the deaths of more than 2,350 dedicated service men and women. Thousands more came home with serious injuries, many of them life altering.

President Bush says withdrawal from Iraq will be up to future Presidents. This is completely unacceptable. While we must not abandon the Iraqi people until we have provided them with the tools necessary to stand on their own, I am outraged that the Administration has no exit strategy to complete our mission and return our soldiers home safely. While many in Congress accept the President's vague promises of an eventual withdrawal, I insist that the Administration provide a more comprehensive plan that

includes specific criteria to determine if our goals in Iraq are being met and to develop a timetable for bringing our soldiers back to their families.

Just as I cautioned the Administration not to act in haste in Iraq, I am advising the President not to act heedlessly with regard to Iran. We need to take a strong stand against the development of nuclear weapon technology in Iran, but we must use diplomacy to resolve the issues at hand. The short and long term consequences of military action, including the possibility of alienating our allies in Europe, Russia, and China who have expressed strong opposition to force, have not been adequately assessed. Nor have we explored the full range of diplomatic options available including more stringent economic sanctions against Iran. The better path is to continue to work with the international community for a peaceful solution.

Natural Disasters Show Gaps in Emergency Preparedness

As a senior member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, I was actively involved in the investigation of the ineffective federal response to Hurricane Katrina. We discovered examples of calls for help that went unanswered, supply requests that went unmet, and flooding notifications that were ignored. While the Committee produced a comprehensive report with some necessary recommendations, we did not go far enough. I firmly believe, as I did in 2002 when the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created, that the



Kauai, Hawaii, Mar. 22, 2006—Kauai Mayor Brian Baptiste, DLNR Deputy Director Bob Masuda, and I survey damage caused by the failure of Ka Loko Reservoir.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) should be an independent, Cabinet-level agency with a direct line to the President.

I am also committed to fixing the leadership problems at DHS which is why I introduced S. 2040, the Department of Homeland Security Qualified Leaders Act, a bill that requires most Senate-confirmed DHS officials possess a certain level of experience and qualifications. There were many failures during Hurricane Katrina and it will require a lot of work to fix them, but it begins with good leadership.

Six months after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, we experienced our own natural disaster as weeks of severe rainfall flooded parts of the state and caused the Ka Loko Reservoir to collapse killing seven people and devastating farmland. I immediately contacted FEMA to ensure that federal resources were ready to help if needed. Fortunately, federal, state, and local officials banded together to provide a united response and recovery effort in Hawaii. I am proud of the way Hawaii responds in times of crisis.

The Ka Loko incident shows we must do more to secure our nation's dams. Senator Dan Inouye and I introduced S. 2444, the Dam Rehabilitation and Repair Act of 2006, to establish a program to provide grants to states for use in rehabilitating publicly-owned dams that fail to meet minimum safety standards; and Senator Christopher Bond (R-MO) and I introduced S. 2735, the National Dam Safety Program Act, which will provide federal funds to state dam safety programs for training, technical assistance, and research.

State of VA Care in Hawaii: Lessons Learned, Promises Kept

As the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, it is my job to ensure that the needs of our nation's veterans are being met. As Senator from Hawaii, it is my responsibility to make sure that the needs of Hawaii's veterans are being met. I take these duties seriously. I consistently encourage federal officials to travel to Hawaii to see the geographic challenges we face as an island state. My constituents deserve the same benefits and services provided in the other 49 states.

For that reason, I was particularly pleased to be joined by



Hilo, Hawaii, Jan. 13, 2006—Hundreds of Hawaii's veterans turned out for Senate field hearings across the state.



Kahului, Maui, Jan. 10, 2006—Telehealth equipment helps ensure that Maui veterans get appropriate treatment for their health needs. Joining me on a tour of the Maui CBOC were Sen. Larry Craig (R-ID) and VA Under Secretary for Health Jonathan Perlin.

Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman, Senator Larry E. Craig (R-ID), during statewide hearings in January 2006. We were joined on every island by top VA health officials, including the VA Under Secretary of Health and the Director of the Pacific Islands Health Care System. The presence of these officials was important because it demonstrated VA's interest in hearing what veterans had to say and willingness to work to improve services.

On Kauai, we examined the challenges in providing long-term care for veterans in Hawaii. On Maui, we looked at access to VA health care and services given the geographic challenges of an island state. On Oahu we examined VA health care and services in general, while on the Big Island we addressed issues dealing with the transition from DoD to VA, particularly for our soldiers who have redeployed with the National Guard and Reserves.

The hearings yielded immediate results. On Kauai, VA announced it would establish a home health care program administered by the Kauai Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). On Maui, VA officials finally acknowledged that it was time to lift restrictions on services for certain veterans, including home care. VA also committed to funding for much-needed telehealth capabilities with non-VA providers and announced that Molokai veterans will get telehealth equipment in April.

During the Hilo hearing, VA announced that the overburdened Kona CBOC will get new space and that VA providers in Hawaii would receive \$1 million for improvements in mental health initiatives. With so many returning veterans and so many more veterans from previous conflicts requiring care, services such as readjustment, transition assistance, and PTSD-related counseling are priorities.

There is more to do for our veterans and for their families. As our military engagements in the 21st century become more complex, our all-volunteer military force, particularly our reservists and National Guardsmen and their families, will continue to make unprecedented sacrifices. I will do all that I can to ensure that the voices of Hawaii's veterans and their families are heard so that federal policies address and respond to our needs.

Global Warming a Serious Threat to Hawaii and Pacific Islanders

There is no denying that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has reached higher levels than at any time in the history of mankind. The burning of fossil fuels for the last hundred years has accelerated the situation and the U.S. contributes more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere than any other nation.



Washington, D.C., Mar. 10, 2006—Commitment to alternative fuel research is the only sure solution to high gas prices.

I am particularly concerned for islands in the Pacific. In Hawaii, there are changes that can only be explained by the buildup of carbon dioxide. Globally, sea level has increased 6 to 14 inches in the last century and it is likely to rise another 17 to 25 inches by 2100. You can imagine what this might mean to port operators, shoreline property owners, tourists and residents who use Hawaii's beautiful beaches, and to island nations and territories in the Pacific where top elevations range between 3 and 100 meters above sea level. A typhoon or hurricane would be devastating to communities on these islands, not to mention the low-lying coastal wetlands of the continental United States.

The U.S. needs to be a leader in addressing climate change and carbon emissions. We must not get stuck in estimating the cost of implementing carbon controls. Inaction may not mean much if you are high and dry in the Nation's Capital, 90 miles from the Atlantic Ocean. But if you are surrounded by water, the risk of inaction is very real, and very frightening.

We must accept the reality of carbon dioxide accumulation -- and embrace the opportunity to use mandatory controls as a way to grow our economy. I would like to see a national commission that would focus on the job growth and technology investment needed to limit or reduce greenhouse gases, and the steps needed for a strategy to get there. If we embrace this issue as a nation, I am convinced that our human resources, technological and scientific expertise, and "national will" can beat it and the U.S. can act as a leader for the rest of the world in reducing carbon emissions.

Financial Literacy Promotes Strong Families

As the Ranking Member on the Readiness Subcommittee in Armed Services, I launched a comprehensive financial education campaign for the military in Honolulu. Sponsored by the National Association of Securities Dealers (NASD) with cooperation from the Department of Defense, the effort will help military personnel and their families man-

age money with competence and confidence. Honolulu's program will be replicated across the country.

We must promote strong families to maintain a capable and ready military force. Financial stability and readiness is a very important component of this effort. Unfortunately, servicemembers and their families are often victimized by predatory lenders that end up with far too much of the military paycheck. This is happening on or near our bases where unscrupulous financiers are charging hidden fees, applying exorbitant interest rates, and marketing unnec-



Honolulu, Hawaii, Apr. 12, 2006—More than 600 service members participated in a financial management seminar conducted at my request. The program will be replicated nationwide.

essary products. We must do all we can to protect consumers, and this financial readiness campaign, coupled with my bill S. 1347, the Low-Cost Alternatives to Payday Loans Act, will help.

Civilians can use sound financial management and investment advice too. I recently partnered with the NASD, the Hawaii State Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, and the Hawaii Council on Economic Education to bring smart investing forums to the people of Kauai and the Big Island, similar to successful workshops I organized last year on Maui and Oahu.



Washington, D.C., Apr. 25, 2006—Financial Literacy Day on the Hill. The Senate approved my resolution designating April as Financial Literacy Month. This is a good time to focus on savings, budgeting, maintaining good credit histories, and applying economic concepts to our daily decisions.